

Live Whole Health

Official news from VA Puget Sound Health Care System



2020 Summer | Issue 1



Message from our Director

VA Puget Sound Health Care System is beginning our phased approach to safely and responsibly resume services that have been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In accordance with federal and state guidelines, our risk-based framework prioritizes patient health needs, staff safety and resource considerations to guide our expansion, scheduling decisions and timeline.

The first phase impacts VA Puget Sound's American Lake and Seattle campuses as well as its VA-operated Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Mount Vernon, Port Angeles and Silverdale. It includes restarting prioritized medical and surgical care, on top of the emergent, urgent and telehealth (primary and some specialty) care we've continued to provide throughout the pandemic.

Subsequent phases would further expand total patients and services.

We will proactively contact Veterans to make appointments, so our policy of no walk-in patients outside of emergent care needs remains in place. If you have health care concerns, please first call us at 1-800-329-8387 or reach out to your primary care team.

Patient and staff safety remain paramount, so should challenges arise that impact our coordinated, phased restart at any point, VA Puget Sound can dial back services to protect and provide the highest standards of care.

*"Your care remains
our #1 priority!"*

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Celebrations

- 8/4: U.S. Coast Guard Birthday
- 8/26: Women's Equity Day
- 9/18: U.S. Air Force Birthday

Have story ideas?

Office of Public Affairs

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Puget Sound Health Care System

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Message from our Director

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And our rigorous safety measures remain in place:

- **100%** screening for signs of COVID-19 infection.
- **100%** use of face covering for everyone entering and inside any of our care sites (if you don't have one, we will provide you with one).
- **100%** physical distancing and environmental cleaning recommendations as outlined by the CDC.
- **No** visitors.

Veterans who have symptoms of COVID-19 such as a fever, cough, and shortness of breath, should contact VA Puget Sound before going to a clinic, urgent care, or emergency room. This can be done

by sending a [secure message](#) through www.myhealth.va.gov or by calling 1-800-329-8387. This helps VA Puget Sound protect our Veterans, medical staff, and other patients.

We appreciate your continued support and understanding during this challenging global crisis. Please know your care remains our #1 priority. Thank you for your service to our great nation!

Sincerely,

Michael Tadych, FACHE
Director

VA Puget Sound Health Care System is beginning our phased approach to safely and responsibly resume services.

Moving Forward Together: **Safe Care** is our Mission

Our efforts to protect the safety of our Veterans, staff and loved ones means VA Puget Sound Health Care System is expected to look very different now. Some of the changes you have, or eventually will, see:

- Employees and patients in mask
- Plexiglass barriers
- Floor markings to promote physical distancing
- Continued COVID-19 screening and testing of patients, staff and visitors.

We appreciate your flexibility and patience during this time! Questions about these protective measures can be directed to your care team.





Get care from the comfort of home

VA Puget Sound continues to maximize personalized virtual care options like telehealth, phone consults and wellness checks. We know these services have been a valuable link to our Veterans during this challenging time, providing increased access to care regardless of where you live. Here are some examples of the many ways you can access care from home:

- **Telephone or Video Appointments:** You can receive care at home — either over the phone or via video using VA Video Connect on your computers, smartphones or tablets. To set up telephone or video appointments, send your health care team a secure message on My HealtheVet by visiting www.myhealth.va.gov. While you may also call at 1-800-329-8387, we request that you only call with urgent needs at this time. To learn more about VA Video Connect, visit www.mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect.
- **Prescription Refills:** You can request prescription refills, order and ship medications to your home using My HealtheVet or the Rx Refill mobile app. Download the app at www.mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill.
- **Secure Messaging:** With a free My HealtheVet Premium account, you can send secure messages to your care team online to ask non-urgent health questions, request referrals and send updates about medical conditions. Other tools available with the Premium account include, ability to access health records, view military service information and ability to join video visits using the VA Appointments tools. There are two ways to register, online or in-person at a VA facility. With the threat of COVID-19, the in-person option has been suspended.

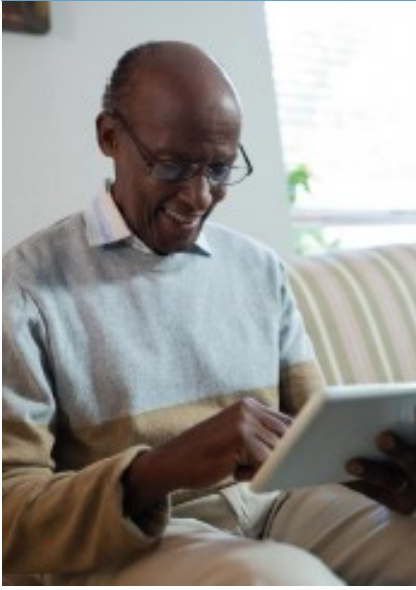
Upgrade to Premium Account Today!

Once you have registered for a My HealtheVet account online, you can easily upgrade to a Premium Account to enjoy additional features. Upgrading is free and only takes a few minutes!

To upgrade online using a VA HealtheVet sign-in partner

(<https://myaccess.dmdc.osd.mil/identitymanagement/> or www.id.me/), Veterans should follow these steps:

- From the My HealtheVet sign in page (www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home), sign in to your Advanced My HealtheVet account using a sign-in partner.
- Select the Upgrade Now button.
- Check the certification box to verify account owner.
- Select Continue.
- Check the Accept My HealtheVet Terms & Conditions box.
- Select Continue to complete the upgrade.



*Be there
for someone in
your life.*

Outpatient mental health options

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we remain committed to providing Veterans with the highest quality of mental health care. In order to ensure the health and safety of Veterans, staff and loved ones:

- We continue to offer routine mental health care via video or telephone until further notice.
- In-person care is limited to those Veterans for whom such care is deemed medically essential by one of our providers.
- If you have questions about your own medical need to be seen in person, please call the clinic first and ask to speak with one of our nurses or with your provider.
 - **Outpatient Mental Health at Seattle Campus:** 206-764-2007
 - **Outpatient Mental Health at American Lake:** 253-583-1759
 - **ATC at Seattle:** 206-764-2457
 - **ATC at American Lake:** 253-583-1759

Even if you are already on campus for another in-person medical appointment, that does not mean it is medically essential for you to have your mental health care in person.

Need someone to talk to? We are here for you!

“We don’t talk about suicide enough in our society,” said VA Puget Sound Health Care System Suicide Prevention Coordinator Kara Walker. “Suicidal thoughts can be a very common symptom of emotional crisis.” Too often, individuals having those thoughts suffer in silence. However, the more we talk about those thoughts and feelings, the easier it becomes to talk about them, and the more opportunities there are to get help.

There’s no single cause or pathway to suicidal thoughts and feelings, but many common triggers include relationship problems, homelessness, employment struggles, financial challenges, legal issues, sleep problems, feeling like a burden to others, or feeling isolated and lonely. Even processing the implications of a new medical diagnosis can overwhelm the strongest person to a point of crisis. Further, broad societal issues such as a pandemic, concerns over social injustices, or the compounding effects of these factors may impact how we think and feel as well.

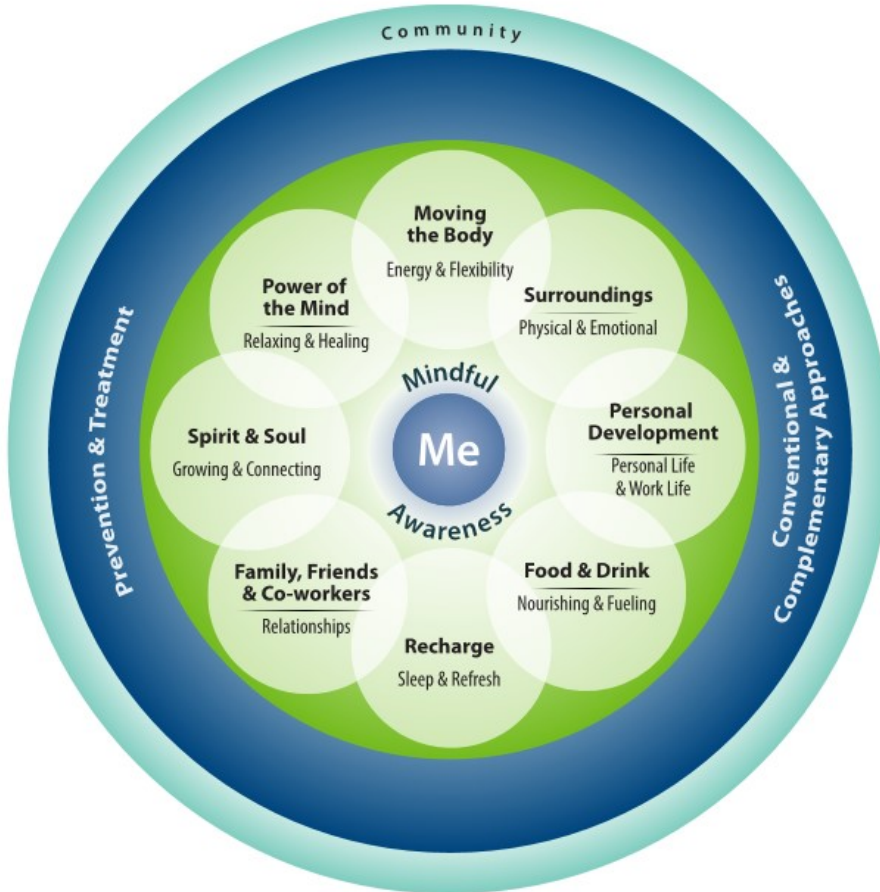
It’s important to recognize the warning signs that often precede a crisis in both ourselves and others—thoughts or comments about suicide and death, changes in substance use, purposelessness, anxiety, feeling trapped or hopeless, social withdrawal, changes in anger, recklessness and mood. But recognizing these warning signs isn’t enough. We have to be equipped to respond by asking uncomfortable questions about thoughts of suicide, genuinely listening without judgment, and recognizing when it’s time to seek

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Whole Health: What matters to you?

Discover what you want and develop your goals



You are the expert on you! The first and most important step in creating your roadmap to your healthiest life is to step back from your health concerns and think about your life. What really matters to you? Why do you want or need your health?

Sometimes, it can be hard to figure this out.

Take a few minutes to relax and really think broadly and openly as you answer the questions. You may use additional paper to answer the questions, if you need to. These questions are an excerpt from the Personal Health Inventory tool. Please visit the VA's Whole Health website to learn more about the Personal Health Inventory tool and how it can help you take charge of your life and health! Visit www.va.gov/wholehealth.

Meaning | Aspiration Purpose

MIND

Our mind can affect our body. Sometimes when we think about stressful things, our heart rate and blood pressure go up. We can use the power of our mind to lower blood pressure or control pain. We can learn to use the connection between our body, brain, and mind. Mind-body practices tap into the power of the mind to heal and cope. To improve my mind-body health, I want to work on: _____

BODY

Our bodies are made for movement. This means moving your body, from walking to playing with grandchildren. Without movement we start to develop problems such as pain, depression and diabetes. Movement can be medicine; it is the very expression of the body. To improve my energy and flexibility, I want to work on: _____

SPIRIT & SOUL

A sense of meaning and purpose in life is important to everybody. When things are hard, where do we turn for strength and comfort? Some people turn to spiritual or religious faith or find comfort in nature. Some connect with art or prefer quiet time alone. Some want to help others. We may express this as a guide to living fully. To improve my spiritual life, I want to work on: _____

Find VA clinical trials

Follow these steps to find recruiting clinical trials.

- Visit <https://clinicaltrials.gov> by clicking the link or typing it into your web browser.
- Type a search term (for example, cancer) into the box under "Condition/Disease."
- Type "Veterans" in the box under "Other Terms."
- Select "United States" from the "Country" drop-down menu.
- After selecting your country, select your state from the "State" drop-down menu and enter your location in the "City" box, or leave these blank to search nationwide.
- Click the "Search" button.
- Make sure the "Recruiting" box is checked on the left of the screen under "Studies."
- Click on the + symbol next to "Funder Type" on the left of the screen, and click the box for "Other U.S. Federal agency."
- Click the "Apply" button.



Improving health outcomes

Research and Development plays a vital role in the Department of Veterans Affairs mission, and nowhere is this more evident than in the VA Puget Sound Health Care System. Our R&D program – the 5th largest in the VA – reflects VA Puget Sound's commitment to providing the highest quality care to our Veterans.

Currently we have over 700 active research projects. And our affiliation with the University of Washington School of Medicine and collaboration with Seattle Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research (SIBCR) are integral to the ongoing discoveries that improve care to our Veterans.

Principal Investigators represent virtually every major clinical department, including: Traumatic Brain Injury & Multiple Blast Exposures, Memory Improvement & Alzheimer's Disease, PTSD & Deployment Health, Parkinson's Disease, Diabetes, Cancer, Substance Abuse, Lower Limb Prosthetics, Genomics, and Health Services. Funding includes sponsors from VA, National Institutes of Health, Department of Defense, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, private industry and the non-profit sector.

Need someone to talk to? We're here! *Continued from page 4*

help for oneself or others.

If the person experiencing those warning signs is you, think "I need to reach out." Friends and family members can offer distraction, conversation, or a different perspective on life. A trusted confidant—a chaplain, health care professional or mental health provider—can provide ongoing discussions about life's struggles and challenges as well as offering skills and tools that may help prevent a crisis.

If you notice those warning signs in others, know that simple acts, gestures or words of kindness can make a significant difference. If someone is in immediate danger, stay with them until they can get to the nearest emergency room or call 911. If an individual finds themselves having a personal crisis with no access to a friend or confidant, the Veterans Crisis Line is always available, 24/7, by calling 1-800-273-8255 (you can press 1 as soon as the line picks up to reach a responder trained to work with Veterans). You can also have a text conversation by sending a message to 838255 or chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net. This free, confidential service is for Veterans, active and reserve service members, their families and their concerned friends.

Take control of your health!

Did you know high blood pressure leads to heart disease and other serious health problems? Want to learn how to manage and keep this “silent killer” from threatening your health? You can learn this and more by scanning the QR code to the right or visiting Veterans Health Library at www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov/. VHL is one-stop source for health information to help Veterans stay well and well-informed. There are over 1,500 health sheets, over 150 videos, Go-to-Guides, and Flipbooks that have been approved by VA experts, and include topics specific to Veterans, for example, posttraumatic stress disorder



(PTSD), combat-related traumatic brain injury, Agent Orange, and cold injury. All health information is available to Veterans, their family and the public, no matter where the Veteran receives care.



Did you know VA Puget Sound offers a wide variety of health education and wellness programs for Veterans to improve health and well-being—from diabetes education and pain management to sleep improvement and women's wellness. Veterans enrolled at one of our ten sites of care can self-refer to most of the classes. For information about co-pays, please call 1-800-329-8387, extension 76299. Download our Patient Education Programs guide www.pugetsound.va.gov/docs/VAPugetSoundPatientEducationClassBrochure-508c.pdf



For easy access to our classes and programs download a free QR code reader from your App store; and scan QR codes to be redirected to those websites.

Would you like to stop smoking or lose weight to become healthier? Are you interested in accessing your health information online? Check out the [Healthy Living Resource Guide](#), to find online resources for a variety of health topics and programs including websites, videos and phone apps.

Class Spotlight

Introduction to Whole Health

is a 2-hour educational and experiential session based on a specific curriculum that exposes participants to the foundational concepts of Whole Health, allows time for self-care and exploration, and for completion of a Personal Health Inventory.

WHEN: By appointment with Peer Support Specialist (PSS) or 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month, 1-3 p.m., with Rehabilitation Care Specialty staff.

WHO: ALL Veterans can self-refer to these classes.

WHERE: From the privacy of your own home via VA Video Connect or telephone.

HOW TO SIGN UP: To sign up or ask questions contact:

- Lamont Tanksley, 206-716-5797, Lamont.Tanksley@va.gov
- Rehabilitation Care Specialty, 206-764-2202

Did you know many patient education classes are available virtually, such as meditation, stress management, cancer support, and even an exercise program? Scan the QR code (left) to see a full listing of programs. COVID-19 has introduced new stresses and made pre-existing stressors worse for many people. There's a new 4-week virtual class called **“Coping During COVID-19”** that meets on Mondays, from 1-2 p.m. This class focuses on managing stressors, sleep improvement, mindfulness and coping with overwhelming emotions. For more information, call Dr. Amee Epler at (253) 583-3720.

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Why hepatitis C testing is important



What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a disease that affects your liver. It is caused by a virus, called the hepatitis C virus, or HCV for short. Approximately 3 million people in the United States are thought to have hepatitis C. Veterans have higher rates of hepatitis C than the general population.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Most people can carry the virus for years and not notice any symptoms. The symptoms of hepatitis C infection are often very mild. The most common symptoms are vague abdominal discomfort, fatigue, and joint pains. Even if you do not have any symptoms, hepatitis C can be a serious illness. Over time, it can cause other health problems, such as cirrhosis and liver cancer. Because it stays in your body, you can give hepatitis C to someone else.

What happens to people with hepatitis C?

Most people who are infected with hepatitis C develop a chronic infection with the virus. The disease generally progresses slowly over the course of 10 to 40 years. The interaction between the immune system and your liver can result in scarring of the liver and loss of liver function.

Should I get tested?

It is now recommended that all adults age 18-79 be tested for hepatitis C at least once. You should also talk to your VA provider about risk factors that may require more regular screening. If you are diagnosed with hepatitis C, new treatments for hepatitis C are able to cure most people in about 12 weeks. Hepatitis C testing is available for all Veterans enrolled in VA health care.

Urgent care at Naval Hospital Bremerton ends July 25

Given increased urgent care and pharmacy options in the community under the MISSION Act, urgent care at Naval Hospital Bremerton will no longer be available to Veterans after July 25, 2020. Veterans can easily find a list of current local in-network providers by visiting <https://www.va.gov/find-locations/>. TriWest continues to qualify new providers and add them to the network, so check the list often to ensure you have the latest list.

Divisions

American Lake
Lakewood
9600 Veterans Drive
Tacoma, WA 98493
253-582-8440



Seattle
1660 S. Columbian
Way
Seattle, WA 98108
206-762-1010



Clinics

Bellevue
13033 Bel-Red Road
Suite 210
Bellevue, WA 98005
425-214-1055



Federal Way
34617 11th Place
South, Suite 301
Federal Way, WA
98003
253-336-4142



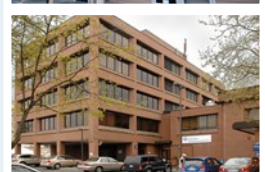
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360-848-8500



North Olympic
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Port Angeles, WA
98362
360-565-7420



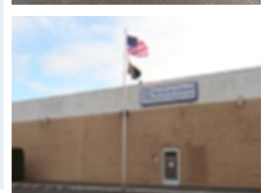
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12360 Lake City Way
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206-384-4382



Silverdale
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South Sound Chehalis
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CRRC

Community Resource
& Referral Center
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206-764-5149

